

Oral Questions

department ordered the Friendly Family Farms eviscerating plant at Steinbach, Manitoba, to burn \$15,000 worth of plastic bags because there were no French markings on them. I ask the minister why this burning was ordered and why the bags were not allowed to be used, in light of the fact that the company's product is marketed only in western Canada.

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I was not aware of this and I was not aware that any order would have to be issued, because in other cases where this situation has been brought to our attention, permission has been given to use unilingual bags in unilingual areas. I will certainly check it out and report back, because I do not think there should be that kind of waste. If bags can be used, and if there is no need for them to have bilingual labels, they are going to be used in strictly unilingual areas.

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SOCIAL SECURITY

REPORT ON FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL MEETING

Mr. Heward Grafftey (Brome-Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Last week there was a meeting of federal and provincial deputy ministers of social services. Can the minister inform the House if any decision was made at that meeting as to the funding of social services? Did provincial officials bring to the attention of the minister's officials the great difficulties caused to the provinces because of the cutback in funds in relation to the amounts offered originally by the federal authority under proposed block funding arrangements for social services?

[Translation]

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I cannot give the result of the meeting of deputy ministers but I can assure the House that no decision has been made yet since the ministers have to decide. Earlier this week I wrote to all my provincial counterparts asking them if they would accept March 6 and 7 as appropriate dates to hold a federal-provincial meeting on social services to know if we might come to some agreement, something I am looking forward to. The \$132 million which had to be frozen for a year was an additional amount provided in the initial offer. Unfortunately it has been frozen because of budget restraints that we saw fit to impose.

Mr. Grafftey: Mr. Speaker, since the federal-provincial conference has been postponed, is the minister still planning to introduce in the House at some time in April a new social services legislation?

Miss Bégin: Mr. Speaker, there must be some misunderstanding. The meeting I am supposed to have with my counterparts has never been postponed. The date I have indicated is that which my counterparts have requested. I am looking forward to this first meeting, which, depending on the general

[Mr. McKenzie.]

consensus of opinion, will determine whether the status quo will be maintained, or whether I shall have the honour to introduce a new legislation.

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[English]

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

NORTHERN TELECOM—ALLEGED ECONOMIC BLACKMAIL TO OBTAIN RATE INCREASE FOR BELL CANADA

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Finance, in the absence of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Is the minister aware of the economic blackmail statement made by the chairman of the board of Northern Telecom, Mr. Scrivener, who said that Northern Telecom would hire more workers if Bell Canada is allowed to increase its residential rate by 20 per cent and its business rate by 28 per cent? That is the largest increase Bell has ever requested. If the minister is aware of this, would he indicate whether he is prepared to recommend to his cabinet colleagues that the millions of dollars in tax concessions provided to Northern Telecom in the last budget, ostensibly to create jobs—which is not being done—will be terminated immediately?

● (1202)

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I was not aware of any statement made by the chairman of Northern Telecom and that our tax system is not of such a nature as to permit us to discriminate at will against any Canadian corporation.

[English]

Mr. Orlikow: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that Northern Telecom laid off 1,000 workers in the minister's province last year, and in view of the fact they have announced the lay-off of another 280 employees in Montreal and about 100 in Brantford, would the minister reconsider the easy position he continues to take with this company which has no intention of increasing its work force in Canada?

[Translation]

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, the tax incentives which a number of corporations are receiving because of the investments they make in specific areas do not compel them to maintain the same number of job opportunities in other areas or other plants in Canada. The law is there and exists for all industries in Canada, and those industries which qualify under the income tax legislation which the House adopted last December are entitled to these benefits. Under these circumstances, there is nothing we can do on the spur of the moment or following a bad statement made by a corporation official.